

A Shaggy Romanian Dog Story

Gene W. Wilkin (#2977)

The 20 stamp collectors gathering this second Sunday morning "look" like any other group engaged in our hobby but they speak Romanian and from what I could see collect only Romanian stamps.

The room overlooks "23 August Street", named for the Russian takeover long ago, and I am on assignment as a volunteer Executive for the International Executive Service Corps working with a brand new FM radio station in Brasov, Romania.

Clutching a copy of the Catalog of Romanian Perfins, my quest is to find out if anyone can identify some of the blank spaces or if anyone has some duplicates to sell. Told by a radio staff member that one collector speaks English that source requests I "come back next week. We have one member who collects perfins."

The following Sunday he appears and I bring out the catalog. There is momentary confusion as the map on the cover is not the entire country. Part of Transylvania is missing. A political statement is

being made of which I am unaware.

Almost all the collectors present gather around and for ten minutes there is a feverish discussion. Nothing gets identified, but the calm atmosphere is temporarily broken.'

I ask if the perfin collector has any duplicates and am quickly told by the English-speaking gentleman "But -- that is his collection." For a moment I saw this bulging mass of "A's" so copies do exist. A very substantial number of Romanian perfins are listed as A or B.

Looking around the room as things went back to quiet time. I note by far the majority of the collectors are working with "mint, never-hinged" stamps. At one table I was offered a small book containing US stamps. They were so brittle that even with stamp tongs there was a distinct danger of shattering.

With salaries at 70 - 90 US dollars a month, a wait of 14 to 14 years for a telephone, and despite finding enormous talent at the radio station, Romania appears to be in a time-warp between 1926 and 1938. In the nearby plaza, Panasonic has a small store with new TV sets and video camera for sale. The natives call it "the museum" as it would take two years of their income to buy one of the larger TV sets.

Oh -- the "shaggy dog." He was parked comfortably and totally unnoticed on the street outside the hotel where the stamp collectors were working.

Having lived with "four-leggeds" for 70-plus years, my heart went out to him along with my hands and between-the-paws scratching and a behind-the-ears rubbing. He gratefully (and liberally) licked my hand.

Later that night, I was struck with the Romanian version of Montezuma's revenge (a.k.a. Dracula's revenge). I was ready to blame a restaurant where I had another version of the ever-present "porc" until I remembered not washing my hands after massaging the shaggy dog.

Rare or not, I can attest that Romaninan perfins do exist and the map of today's Romania does include Transylvania.